Examining the role of social media-based destination brand community in evoking tourists' emotions and intention to co-create and visit

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Abstract

Purpose – Using the stimulus-organism-response model as the theoretical basis, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a social media-based destination brand community (SMDBC) on tourists' emotions, and the subsequent effect on the intention to co-create value and visit.

Design/methodology/approach – The theoretical framework was tested using survey data from 551 Chinese social media users who were followers of Japanese social media pages. Partial least squares–structural equation modelling was adopted to perform the latent variable analysis.

Findings – The findings reveal that SMDBC plays a considerable role in shaping tourists' emotions, including joy, love and positive surprise, which, in turn, have a significant impact on consumers' intention to co-create value and visit. Contrary to previous studies, the effect of joy on tourists' intention to co-create and visit is found to be insignificant.

Research limitations/implications – The present study elucidates the importance and relevance of SMDBC in evoking tourists' positive emotions, and subsequently their intention to co-create value and visit. Future research is recommended to compare and contrast SMDBC with other marketing and branding activities to provide greater insights into the phenomenon in a dynamic environment.

Practical implications – This study enables academics and business practitioners to better comprehend the effectiveness of SMDBC in driving tourists' favourable assessment and behavioural intentions to improve resource allocation. In particular, destination marketers are recommended to optimise SMDBC and encourage discussion on SMDBC among users.

Originality/value – As literature in relation to the importance of SMDBC in evoking tourists' emotions incorporating its link with tourists' intention to co-create value and visit is relatively scarce, this study contributes to the branding and destination tourism research by empirically articulating the relevance of SMDBC in stimulating tourists' emotions and subsequently value co-creation and visit intention.

Keywords Tourism, Value co-creation, Emotions, PLS-SEM, Destination marketing, Social media brand community

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The diffusion of social media has varied the means by which tourists search for information related to destinations (Buhalis, 2019; Leung *et al.*, 2019), creating opportunities for marketers to engage with tourists on social-media platforms by value co-creation activities through various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, WeChat and TripAdvisor (Lim *et al.*, 2020; Lund *et al.*, 2018; Luo *et al.*, 2019). Notably, the number of social-media monthly active users was more than three billion in 2019, with a 45% global social-media penetration rate (Statista, 2019a). This increase was associated with a growth in the amount of time spent on social networks, as internet users spent about 136 min on social media platforms per day

(Statista, 2018) and accounted for more than 30% of worldwide advertising spending in 2019 (Statista, 2019b).

With the advancement of social media, tourism practitioners and marketers have changed from driving sales to a greater focus on developing a relationship with tourists, aiming to evoke tourists' positive emotions and thereby strengthening their intention to visit (Chen *et al.*, 2014; Leung *et al.*, 2019; Veloutsou and Ruiz-Mafe, 2020). More recently, there has been a greater focus on initiating value co-creation activities to engage consumers on social media platforms, aiming at stimulating their positive emotions and driving their loyalty so as to build competitive advantages for destinations (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019; Chung and Koo, 2015; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). For instance, practitioners have increasingly engaged with tourists via social media-based destination brand communities (SMDBC) developed by fans of specific destinations (e.g. Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul and London, etc.) without geographical limitation. This could be in the form of sharing of resources, information, culture and the history of the focal destination (Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Moro and Rita, 2018; Swanson, 2017). SMDBC enables two-way communication between tourists and marketers, as well as interaction amongst tourists (Hook *et al.*, 2018; Williams *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, practitioners aim to initiate instantaneous communication on SMDBC in the form of text messages, photos and videos to encourage tourists' participation in commenting and sharing information related to destinations (Moran *et al.*, 2019; Hook *et al.*, 2018; Zadeh *et al.*, 2019). It can, thus, be surmised that SMDBC has emerged as a dynamic platform for practitioners to interact with tourists (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015; Pourfakhimi *et al.*, 2020), generate favourable assessment towards their target destinations and thereby sustain or strengthen the relationships between destinations and tourists (Hays *et al.*, 2013).

Along with this notion, affective assessment can play a significant role in the communication process. Particularly, emotions, which are described as tourists' affective states and are characterised by episodes of feelings linking with specific objects or events (Cohen and Areni, 1991), are found to be essential in driving tourists' behaviours (Cohen *et al.*, 2014; Hosany *et al.*, 2017), especially at the pre-travel stage (Gnoth, 1997). Emotions can be developed by exposure to information and memorable experiences via various media sources, such as traditional and website advertisements (Septianto *et al.*, 2020), as well as interaction amongst individuals on online platforms (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Johnson, 2016).

As such, social media communications are deemed to be influential in strengthening tourists' intention to co-create destination brand value and visit (Chang *et al.*, 2018; Huang *et al.*, 2013; Ji *et al.*, 2016). Tourists with positive emotions are willing to share content related to their favourite destinations with like-minded peers on SMDBC (Serra-Cantallops *et al.*, 2018). Tourists are often found to make their destination choice based on their emotions, thus indicating the importance in studying the antecedents and consequences of tourists' emotions (Huang *et al.*, 2013). Amongst various constructs related to emotions, joy, love and positive surprise are most evident in tourism research (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Honsany *et al.*, 2017; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). Notwithstanding, prior studies mainly focus on the conceptualisation and the development of measurement scales (Hosany and Gilbert,

2010; Hosany and Prayag, 2013; Hosany *et al.*, 2015), thus highlighting a need to explore emotions in response to stimuli and assessment that may lead to a behavioural outcome in the context of SMDBC (Prayag *et al.*, 2017; Sharma and Nayak, 2019).

Prior studies have asserted the importance of tourists' emotions on their positive behavioural intention, including satisfaction, intention to visit and referral (Hosany and Prayag, 2014; Hosany *et al.*, 2015; Poria and Gvili, 2007; Prayag *et al.*, 2013). Despite the growing importance of co-creation in shaping tourists' positive behaviours, the understanding of associations between tourists' emotions and their intention to co-create value towards destinations is still limited (Rather *et al.*, 2019; Taheri *et al.*, 2019). In the tourism context, although most of the literature confirms the importance of co-creation in shaping tourists' positive behaviours, the empirical findings related to the determinants of co-creation are largely limited to the role of firm-initiated support on co-creation intention and its related consequences (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015; Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Luo *et al.* (2019) asserted the importance of information exchange between tourists on online communities in driving customer engagement and recommended that tourism marketers should gain a greater understanding of the value co-creation process. It is, thus, necessary to reconsider destination (tourism) marketing in relation to value co-creation where tourists' affective assessment towards destination brand in the social media communication process would likely play a pivotal role to their subsequent behaviour (Veloutsou and Ruiz-Mafe, 2020).

Given the growing importance of SMDBC in driving tourists' behaviours, integrating the impacts of SMDBC on tourists' emotions and their behavioural intention, especially their intention to co-create value and visit, is essential to both academics and practitioners (Prayag *et al.*, 2017). Particularly, tourists increasingly rely on information and interactive experiences obtained from SMDBC in their decision-making processes (Inversini, 2019; Liao *et al.*, 2020; Leung *et al.*, 2019; Moro and Rita, 2018). For instance, tourists in China are known to passionately search for tourism-related information and experiences using C-Trip, Weibo and WeChat pages (Lin *et al.*, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Skavronskaya *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, the use of social media to drive positive emotions, as well as the relationship between tourists and destinations still require continual attention (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2019; Moro and Rita, 2018). Grounded on the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, the objective of the present study was to examine the impact of SMDBC on tourists' emotions and subsequently their behavioural intention, including the tourists' co-creation and visit intentions. In particular, the role of SMDBC is to explore communities on such as Weibo, C-Trip, Trip Advisor and WeChat pages for members discussing tourism and leisure, and understanding how these discussions shape consumers' emotions, including joy, love and positive surprise, which may lead to behavioural intention towards a destination. It is believed that the study would provide a substantial contribution to the branding literature by enhancing the understanding of how SMDBC drives tourists' emotional perceptions, value co-creation

intention and intention to visit. It will, thus, provide useful theoretical and managerial insights through the lens of destination tourism.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Stimulus-organism-response model

The impact of SMDBC on tourists' emotions and behavioural intentions can be explained by the S-O-R model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Recent marketing and tourism literature (Carlson *et al.*, 2018; Kamboj *et al.*, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2020) have adopted the S-O-R model to illustrate the impact of external influences (i.e. stimulus) on consumers' internal processes (i.e. organism) responding to the stimulus, and the resulting consumer behaviour (i.e. responses). In particular, the external influences comprise firm-initiated social media communication, such as information that facilitates consumers' goal attainment, which is entertaining and allows interaction between firms and consumers (Carson *et al.*, 2018; Kim and Johnson, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Internal processes include the consumers' emotional state, such as pleasure and arousal and cognitive responses, such as expectations and perceived information quality (Kim and Johnson, 2016). Finally, behavioural responses include consumers' intention to purchase, recommend or to co-create and develop brand loyalty (Cheah *et al*, 2019; Lim *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

The S-O-R model has also been extended to the tourism context, conceptualising information and interactive experiences obtained from virtual platforms as environmental stimulus (Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Islam and Rahman, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2015), while the organism is conceptualised as the users' emotional intermediary state, which represents the processes that facilitate users' responses to a stimulus (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Finally, scholars conceptualise response as the outcome reflected by users' positive behavioural intentions, including an intention to recommend, customer loyalty and purchase and repurchase intention (Cheah *et al.*, 2020; Lim *et al.*, 2019; Lin *et al.*, 2017; Ting *et al.*, 2019). Thus, stimulus represents features of the virtual environment that facilitate information acquisition and interactive experiences, as reflected in the features of SMDBC (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013; Islam and Rahman, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Organism represents a users' emotional state and incorporates all previous engaged experiences, as reflected in users' emotions evoked from SMDBC (Kim *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). The response represents users' attitudinal loyalty outcomes, as reflected by users' intention to co-create and visit the destination discussed in the SMDBC (Cheah *et al.*, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Lim *et al.*, 2019; Lin *et al.*, 2017). Considering the importance of information and interactive experiences in stimulating tourists' emotional reactions and subsequent attitudinal loyalty as responses, the S-O-R model presents as an appropriate framework to examine the influences of SMDBC on tourists' emotional reactions and behavioural intentions (Lin *et al.*, 2017). As such, in line with prior studies, information and interactive experiences obtained from SMDBC are conceptualised as environmental stimulus (S), while tourists' emotions are conceptualised as

the organism (O) and tourists' intention to co-create and visit is conceptualised as a response (R) within the context of this study.

Social media destination Brand community as environmental stimuli

Brand community refers to "a specialised, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001, p. 412). With technological advancement, marketers increasingly use social media platforms to communicate brand-related information and encourage consumers to share brand-related experiences to drive consumer-brand relationships (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015; Laroche *et al.*, 2012). Given its importance, it is of no surprise that destination marketers adopt social-media platforms to develop destination brand communities and take advantage of the interactive features to discuss and diffuse information (Hook *et al.*, 2018; Moro and Rita, 2018; Moran *et al.*, 2019). This will then enhance the relationship between tourists and destinations, as manifested by tourists' intention to co-create value for destinations via social-media platforms (Veloutsou and Ruiz-Mafe, 2020).

In the destination marketing context, the combination of social-media and destination brand community is understood as an SMDBC. Particularly SMDBC is being conceptualised as destination brand communities that are available on social-media platforms, such as Facebook, TripAdvisor, C-Trip, Weibo and WeChat. These platforms enable tourists who have similar interests to network and share tourism information with their peers or other users (Fotis *et al.*, 2011; Laroche *et al.*, 2012). Users have the power to create and share their knowledge and opinions related to various destinations, enjoying influential power in affecting individuals' perceptions towards the destinations (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Inversini *et al.*, 2009; Pourfakhimi *et al.*, 2020). The information available on the SMDBC is perceived as more credible and trustworthy because it is created by SMDBC members rather than initiated by marketers (Cheung *et al.*, 2020a; Fotis *et al.*, 2011). As such, tourists obtain benefits from the SMDBC by searching and exchanging information about destinations, stories about sightseeing spots and travelling experiences (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019; Wang and Pizam, 2011). The growing importance of SMDBC in building consumers' perceptions towards destinations justifies the research needed to understand the role of SMDBC in shaping tourists' emotions and behavioural intentions.

Tourists' emotions as an organism

Being regarded as an important outcome of destination marketing strategies, tourists' emotions are manifested by their feelings associated with specific objects or events (Cohen and Areni, 1991; Hosany, 2012). Arguably, emotions can be categorised as a series of individualistic affective/affectional states, such as joy, love, surprise, happiness and excitement (Prayag *et al.*, 2017), and are affected by experiences associated with information received from communication channels and communication between members in brand communities (Chang *et al.*, 2018; Spears *et al.*, 2012). Tourism research

developed constructs to measure tourists' emotions in an attempt to capture the psychological emotions associated with their experiences. In particular, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) developed destination emotion scales to measure the complexity of tourists' emotions, consisting of three emotional dimensions including joy, love and positive surprise, which are asserted to be predictors of tourists' satisfaction. Joy is inextricably linked with positive outcomes, such as goals, pleasures and enjoyment (Prayag *et al.*, 2017). Love is associated with individuals' affective experiences towards products and brands (Suetrong *et al.*, 2018). A positive surprise is an emotional response resulting from unexpected events (Prayag *et al.*, 2017). These three emotional dimensions were validated by Lee and Kyle (2012) and Hosany *et al.* (2015) and are recognised as useful constructs to study tourists' behaviours in the area of tourism and destination marketing (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010).

Despite its antecedents in an under-explored research area, the links between communication via various channels and tourists' emotions are logical and justified as important research topics (Prayag *et al.*, 2017). Arguably, tourists' emotions are influenced by various forms of marketing communication and two-way interaction between tourists via different channels, such as websites, forums and social media platforms (Kim *et al.*, 2013; Stojanovic *et al.*, 2018). Prior studies concluded that tourists enjoy the two-way interactions with tourism marketers and other like-minded users on SMDBC, which, in turn, drives positive emotions towards the destinations (Kim and Johnson, 2016; Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Moro and Rita, 2018). For example, when tourists interact with like-minded users on SMDBC to discuss information about theme parks, restaurants and hotels, they are engaged in learning and sharing information that evokes the destination, which is a useful tool for driving positive emotions (Moro and Rita, 2018; Pham and Gammoh, 2015), such as joy and love (Prayag *et al.*, 2017). In a similar vein, when tourists share their locations (i.e. also known as "check-in") on their social media pages, tourism marketers offer discounts, coupons and gifts to the tourists, resulting in positive surprise (Hudson and Thal, 2013).

The two-way interaction in sharing information and experience on SMDBC is particularly useful in driving the emotional connections of tourists who have less travel experience (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). Tourists are attracted by the experiences shared by more seasoned travellers within the SMDBC and become deeply engaged with the destination during the interaction process (Moro and Rita, 2018). Thus, information seeking and exchange on SMDBC may be useful in driving tourists' positive emotions. Thus, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1. The SMDBC is positively linked with the emotion of joy for the destination.

H2. The SMDBC is positively linked with the emotion of love for the destination.

H3. The SMDBC is positively linked with the emotion of positive surprise for the destination.

Co-creation as response

Co-creation originated from the assertion that consumers no longer receive product-related information passively but serve as active contributors in creating value for firms (Ind and Coates, 2013; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Co-creation occurs when consumers have dynamic interaction with firms in various phases of the value-creation process, such as new product development, package design and performance review of products and services (France *et al.*, 2018; Ind and Coates, 2013). With the development of social media platforms, marketers encourage consumers to co-create value for firms by inviting them to provide ideas in relation to the design and attributes of products through social-media brand communities, such as Facebook, Instagram and WeChat brand pages (Rihova *et al.*, 2015; Zaheh et al., 2019). Value is co-created through the interaction process between firms and consumers, and thus, consumers are regarded as creators of brand equity, justifying the argument that marketers should embrace the concept of co-creation and encourage consumer participation in brand building processes (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; González-Mansilla *et al.*, 2019).

To the best of our knowledge, very few studies have tried to explore the associations between tourists' emotions and their intention to co-create value; however, it is logical to propose the links between them. Wu *et al.* (2017) found that consumers' evaluation of brands, expressed as feelings, desirability and perceived fitness of the services provided by brands, is a predictor of value co-creation behaviour. Simon and Tossan (2018) posited that consumer-brand interaction is a driver of satisfaction and brand gratitude, and as such, positive emotion has a significant impact on co-creation intention. More recently, Zaheh *et al.* (2019) asserted that interactions between users on social media platforms are effective in driving positive feelings about value co-creation behaviours and thereby strengthening co-creation intentions. Thus, prior studies have posited a link between consumers' evaluation and feelings as a result of interactions and co-creation behaviour. It is, therefore, logical to posit that a tourists' emotional state which has been acquired through information sharing and interaction is positively related to their co-creation intention. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H4. The emotion of joy positively influences co-creation intention.

H5. The emotion of love positively influences co-creation intention.

H6. The emotion of positive surprise positively influences co-creation intention.

Intention to visit as a response

Tourist's visit intention is considered one of the most important consequences of their co-creation processes, as it represents a tourist's intention to consider the destination as a first choice in their decision-making process over other destinations (Tussyadiah *et al.*, 2018; Ting *et al.*, 2019). The intention to visit has attracted scholarly attention as it is an important indicator in the measurement of tourism loyalty (Leong *et al.*, 2015). Prior studies concluded that tourists' intention to co-create value is positively associated with behavioural intentions, such as visit intention and intention to recommend (Chathoth

et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2013; Parihar and Dawra, 2020). Indeed, when tourists are engaged in the process of co-creating value for destinations, they invest cognitive effort to understand more about the destination (Cheung et al., 2020b), which, in turn, strengthens their destination brand knowledge and intention to visit (Luo et al., 2019). In particular, highly engaged tourists are active in providing their own ideas and feedback about the activities that may be organised by destinations. This may help marketers to improve the quality of activities within destinations, which, in turn, builds the destination brand value (Rather et al., 2019). As such, when tourists are engaged in the destination brand value co-creation process, they are motivated to understand more about their favourite destinations and thereby may strengthen their intention to visit (France et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2018; Rather et al., 2019). Thus, it is logical to consider tourists' intention to visit as an outcome of their co-creation process, justifying the following hypothesis:

H7. Co-creation intention has a positive impact on the intention to visit.

Methodology

Using an online survey approach to collect primary data, the targeted population of this study were Chinese nationals from mainland China who are pre-travellers and visitors of an SMDBC discussing Japan as a travel destination, such as Ctrip's forum, Weibo and WeChat. Japan was selected as the study context given the number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan has increased significantly since 2014 and as a result of economic development in China (Ji et al., 2016). Chinese tourists are attracted by the culture, restaurants and theme parks in Japanese cities, such as Tokyo, Osaka and Fujisan, and hence Japan is perceived as one of the most attractive destinations in Chinese tourists' minds (Ji et al., 2016). In line with prior tourism studies, respondents on Ctrip's forum, MaFengWo's forum, Qunar's forum, Weibo and WeChat discussing tourism information about Japan were approached given these social media destination communities are deemed to be representative social media platforms in China (Lu and Liu, 2016; Xu et al., 2019).

Self-administered online surveys hosted on Qualtrics were administered during the data collection process, sending the questionnaire links and QR codes to respondents by e-mail, WeChat and Weibo. The definition of SMDBC was provided at the start of the survey, incorporating screenshots of discussion and interaction on SMDBC to help familiarise respondents with the survey. Respondents who had no experience in visiting an SMDBC related to Japanese travel were excluded from the study.

The research hypotheses were tested by measurement items adopted from prior studies (Table A2), and these items were measured by a seven-point Likert scale to indicate the level of agreement. In particular, six items were adapted from Laroche et al. (2012) to measure SMDBC. Measurement items from Prayag et al. (2017) were also adapted to measure tourists' emotions, using five items to measure joy, three items to measure love and five items to measure positive surprise. Regarding the behavioural responses, three items were adapted

from Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) to measure co-creation and three items based on Chen et al. (2014) and Chung et al. (2015) were used to measure intention to visit.

Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) by means of SmartPLS v 3.3.2 was applied to perform the latent variable analysis with the 5,000-bootstrap procedure (Ringle et al., 2015; Sarstedt and Cheah, 2019). PLS-SEM was considered as a suitable technique in this study for several reasons. Firstly, PLS-SEM is preferred for a study with complex model structures consisting of direct and indirect relationships (Hair et al., 2017). Secondly, PLS-SEM supports the causal-prediction goal with the combination of both explanatory and predictive approaches (Chin et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2020). Thirdly, recent studies in tourism marketing (Harrigan et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2019) have also applied PLS-SEM to perform analysis and have demonstrated its robustness in measurement and structural assessment.

Findings

Respondent profile

In total, 805 users of an SMDBC with a keen interest in visiting Japan were invited to participate in the survey and of that number, 588 agreed to participate. However, 73 incomplete questionnaires were discarded. The final data (n = 551), resulting in a 63.9% response rate for the sample used for the data analysis. The final data met the minimum sample size suggested by Kock and Hadaya (2018) in PLS-SEM, namely, the inverse square root (n > 160) and gamma-exponential methods (n > 146). The sample comprising men (38.5%) and women (61.5%), with respondents between 18 and 65 years of age, the majority (46.7%) were between 18 and 25 years of age, followed by 26-30 (17.6%) and 31-35 (12.9%). More than 90% of the respondents (90.2%) were university educated. All respondents were experienced users of social media, with all (100%) respondents reporting to have a WeChat, Weibo or a C-Trip account. More than 40% of the respondents (41.7%) were signed into social-media platforms all of the time, while 24.9% and 23.8% of respondents signed into social media platforms 6-10 times and 2-5 times a day, respectively, on average. Overall, the respondents were young, had substantial experience in using social media and are a good representation of SMDBC users in China (Liu et al., 2018).

Common method variance

As the measures of all the variables were collected from a similar source, it is acknowledged that the common variance bias could overstate the strength of the relationships between the constructs in the model. This potential bias was assessed via a full collinearity assessment as suggested by Kock and Lynn (2012). Based on the Table A1 presented in Appendix, the multicollinearity assessment was undertaken by checking the variance inflation factor (VIF), and the results indicate that the VIF was less than five when a dummy variable was regressed against all the variables in the model (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, the result provides assurance that common method bias does not pose a threat within the present study.

Measurement model results

The measurement (outer) model was assessed by the loadings of individual measurement items (factor loadings), Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability (CR), along with the average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2017) and using Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and used the Heterotrait and Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler *et al.*, 2015; Franke and Sarstedt, 2019) to assess discriminant validity of the research model.

As presented in Table A2, the results indicated a good level of internal consistency as Cronbach's alpha and the CR of each construct were greater than 0.852 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the loadings of individual items exceeded 0.765 and were highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The AVE criterion was satisfied as the AVE scores of all constructs were greater than the recommended 0.50 threshold (Table A3), thus confirming convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, as presented in Tables A3 and A4, the square roots of the AVEs for the latent constructs were larger than the corresponding latent-variable correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), while the values of HTMT ratio of all of the constructs in the research model are smaller than the threshold value of 0.90 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015; Franke and Sarstedt, 2019), thus confirming discriminant validity.

Structural model results

The structural model was examined by assessing the path coefficients (beta), p-values, R^2 values, f^2 values and Q^2 predict values. The hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping procedure with a re-sampling of 5,000 to examine the significance of the path coefficients amongst constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Using a two-tailed test, a hypothesis was accepted when the t-value exceed critical value (i.e. $t \geq 1.96$, $p \leq 0.05$).

Figure 1 and Table A5 present the results of the hypotheses testing, with six of the seven hypotheses being supported. In particular, the impact of SMDBC on joy ($\beta = 0.605$, $p = 0.000$), love ($\beta = 0.611$, $p = 0.000$) and positive surprise ($\beta = 0.627$, $p = 0.000$) were strong, positive and significant, confirming *H1*, *H2* and *H3*. Regarding the links between tourists' emotions and their behavioural intention, co-creation has a significant positive relationship with love ($\beta = 0.339$, $p = 0.000$) and positive surprise ($\beta = 0.314$, $p = 0.002$), but no joy ($\beta = 0.019$, $p = 0.806$), confirming *H5* and *H6* but rejecting *H4*. Finally, the impact of co-creation on an intention to visit is strong, positive and significant ($\beta = 0.775$, $p = 0.000$), supporting *H7*.

The indirect effects amongst paths are provided. In particular, the indirect effect of SMDBC on co-creation through joy ($\beta = 0.011$, $p = 0.808$) was weak and non-significant. The indirect effects of SMDBC on co-creation through love ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.001$) and positive surprise ($\beta = 0.197$, $p = 0.003$) were positive and significant. Additionally, the indirect effects of SMDBC on an intention to visit through love and co-creation were ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.001$) and positive surprise and co-creation ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.004$). However, the indirect effect of SMDBC on an intention to visit through joy ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = 0.808$) was weak and non-significant. Regarding the indirect effects of tourists' emotions on an intention to visit, the indirect effect of love ($\beta = 0.263$, $p = 0.000$) and positive surprise ($\beta = 0.243$, $p = 0.002$) on an intention to visit was positive and significant. However, the indirect effect of joy ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.811$) on an intention to visit was weak and non-significant. The results reveal that SMDBC plays a considerable role in evoking tourists' love and positive surprise, which, in turn, drives their intention to co-create and visit.

Figure 1 Research model in this study
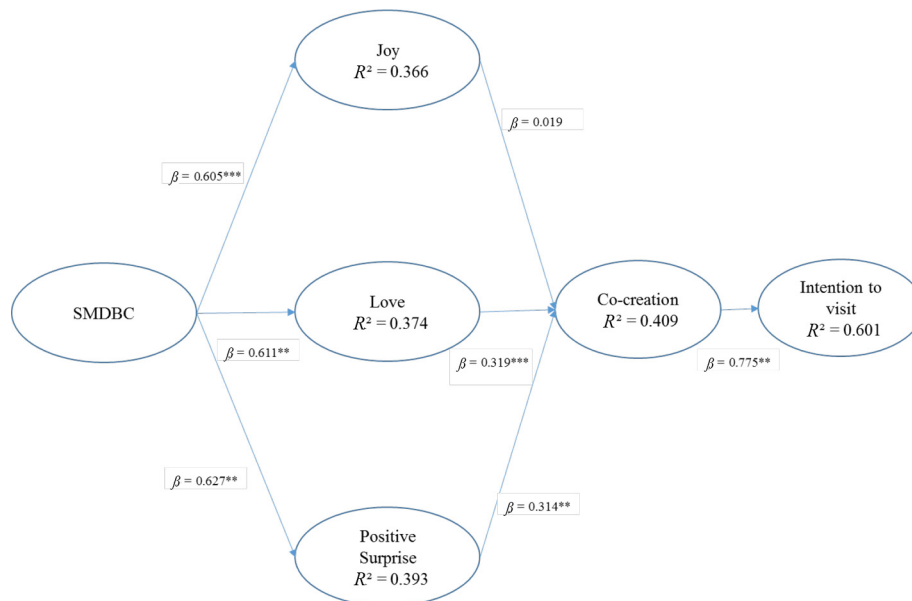
Notes: SMDBC = Social media destination brand community, paths significant at **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

In addition to this analysis, a coefficient of determination was used to assess the research model's explanatory power (Figure 1 and Table A5). The R^2 values for joy ($R^2 = 0.366$), love ($R^2 = 0.374$), positive surprise ($R^2 = 0.393$), co-creation ($R^2 = 0.409$) and intention to visit ($R^2 = 0.601$) exceeded 0.35 and were higher than the recommended criterion benchmark of 0.10 (Chin, 1998). The results indicate that the endogenous constructs are accurately explained by the exogenous constructs in the research model, suggesting that a meaningful amount of variation in the endogenous variables was explained. The R^2 value of intention to visit was 0.601, revealing that the model explains 60.1% of the variance of a tourists' intention to visit.

The effect sizes (f^2) of the paths (Table A5) were also checked to assess the explaining power of exogenous constructs (Cohen, 1988). In particular, the effect size is large if $f^2 \geq 0.35$, is considered medium if $f^2 \geq 0.15$ and small if $f^2 \geq 0.05$, while the cut-off value is 0.02 (Cohen, 1988). The effect size of SMDBC in explaining positive surprise ($f^2 = 0.649$) was the strongest, followed by love ($f^2 = 0.597$) and joy ($f^2 = 0.578$). It reveals that the effect sizes of SMDBC on tourists' emotions were large. The effect size of love on co-creation ($f^2 = 0.052$) was small, but effect size of positive surprise ($f^2 = 0.043$) on co-creation was regarded as very small and the effect size of joy on co-creation ($f^2 = 0.000$) was smaller than the cut-off value, revealing that joy had little or no effect on co-creation.

Additionally, the blindfolding procedure (Table A5) was performed to check the predictive relevance (Q^2) of the research model. The checking of Q^2 is useful because it helps us to use PLS-SEM to explore the prediction results of the model. The values of Q^2 in each model are greater than zero, revealing that the exogenous latent variables are good enough to predict endogenous variables and thereby confirming that the predictive relevance of the model is acceptable (Fornell and Cha, 1994; Hair *et al.*, 2017). Finally, the predictive power of the research model was assessed using PLS-predict (Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Shmueli *et al.*, 2019) to understand the prediction error statistics, as the root mean square error (RMSE) for all indicators. Based on Table A6, the RMSE results reveal that the value of the majority of the indicators of joy, love and positive surprise in the linear regression model is smaller than the PLS model. As such, it can be concluded that the predictive power of joy and positive surprise has high predictive power, while love has moderate predictive power (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019). In addition, co-creation and intention have a medium predictive power that illustrates the overall research model, has predictive power when proposing new observations.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study reveal interesting insights. Firstly, this study provides empirical evidence that presents the impact of SMDBC in driving tourists' positive emotions, including joy, love and positive surprise, extending the findings of prior studies (Habibi *et al.*, 2016; Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). While prior studies (Habibi *et al.*, 2016; Laroche *et al.*, 2012) found the importance of SMDBC in driving consumers' attitudinal loyalty and behaviour outcomes, this study extends the findings by corroborating the importance of SMDBC in the destination tourism context (Grissemann and Stokburger-

Sauer, 2012; Jovicic, 2019; Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Moro and Rita, 2018). Secondly, this study also corroborates the importance of tourists' love and positive surprise in driving tourists' intention to co-create and visit. Moreover, love has a stronger effect on co-creation intention than a positive surprise. While prior studies (Hosany and Prayag, 2013; Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Prayag *et al.*, 2017) found that joy, love and positive surprise play considerable roles in driving destination image and satisfaction, the present study extends the findings by corroborating the effects of tourists' love and positive surprise on their co-creation intention, which further emphasises the importance of tourists' love and positive surprise in shaping tourists' behaviours, and thereby creating value for destinations.

Thirdly, the non-significant relationship between joy and co-creation found in this study is not consistent with the previous literature. The non-significant association between joy and co-creation may be explained by tourists' preference towards co-creation on SMDBC. In this study, co-creation was operationalised as a tourists' intention to provide assistance to other users and express their personal needs to the operator of SMDBC, thus creating value together. Arguably, the co-creation intention is voluntary in nature, requiring tourists to be highly involved and satisfied with the SMDBC and the destination. Tourists who are surrounded with love and positive surprise should also display strong and positive feelings and affection towards the SMDBC and the destination, hence become active in co-creating value within an SMDBC. However, as joy is associated with positive outcomes, such as attaining some desirable outcomes, it is more related to positive progress towards the realisation of tourists' goals. As such it is less relevant to the intention to help others and create value for destinations, as reflected by co-creation.

Finally, the findings confirm a positive relationship between co-creation intention and tourists' intention to visit the destination, justifying the significance of co-creation in strengthening tourists' loyalty intention (Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). This suggests that when visitors are involved in co-creation, their intention to visit the destination is higher, thereby confirming the importance of co-creation in shaping tourists' behaviours.

Theoretical implications

The importance of building a consumer-brand relationship in the social media context, such as consumer-brand engagement, brand commitment and brand loyalty is well documented in the marketing literature (Coelho *et al.*, 2019; Dessart and Duclou, 2019; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2019; Kumar and Nayak, 2019). However, limited studies have empirically examined the role of SMDBC in building relationships between tourists and destinations. Even though past literature confirms the importance of brand communities on social media in driving community engagement (Laroche *et al.*, 2012), consumer-brand relationship (Laroche *et al.*, 2013), brand loyalty (Habibi *et al.*, 2016) and brand trust of reputable commercial brands, such as Apple, Nike and Starbucks (Habibi *et al.*, 2014), studies pertaining to the importance of brand communities in tourism context are scarce. This study contributes to marketing and branding literature by extending the understanding of the

consumer-brand relationship in the destination tourism context. Specifically, it incorporates the concept of destination brand community on social media (Laroche *et al.*, 2012; Moro and Rita, 2018), and thus the relevance of SMDBC into the assessment of tourists' emotions and the relationship between tourists and destinations, including their intention to co-create value for the destination in the community.

This study also highlights the relevance of SMDBC with salient features, such as useful information, direct user inputs and experience sharing in evoking tourists' positive emotions, namely, joy, love and positive surprise (Hosany and Prayag, 2013; Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). As such, SMDBC can be regarded as a meaningful driver of tourists' positive emotions and tourist-destination relationships. Moreover, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on destination brand image and loyalty by considering value co-creation as an interactive outcome of the tourist-SMDBC relationship, thus justifying the importance of tourists' (positive) emotions in destination tourism and marketing. Despite the prevalence of social media with less face-to-face interaction in the contemporary business setting, the present study reveals that love and positive surprise still play a considerable role in driving tourists' intention to co-create and visit in a dynamic environment.

This study also supports the applicability of the S-O-R model in explaining tourists' internal assessment and behavioural responses to environmental cues. In particular, with the advancement of social media technologies, it is argued that the interactive features of an SMDBC are seen as stimuli that can evoke tourists' affective assessment (organism) rather than just the cognitive faculty. This process will eventually consummate in their responses, as depicted by intention to co-create value in the community and visit. In other words, tourists' internal states are stimulated by destination-related information and interactive experiences obtained from an SMDBC, which, in turn, drives their behavioural responses. In light of the advancement of digital technology and direct marketing, SMDBC has emerged as a meaningful online environmental stimulus in the S-O-R model, as well as a significant component in tourism marketing research.

Managerial implications

The findings offer some interesting managerial implications, providing meaningful implications for business practitioners and destination marketers to drive tourists' emotions and value co-creation intention effectively. In particular, given the usefulness of SMDBC, practitioners are recommended to update the SMDBC frequently, as well as prepare interactive posts to facilitate user discussion and decision-making. This will motivate tourists' to be more engaged within conversations about the destination and stimulate their positive emotions, including joy, love and positive surprise. Such emotional states and experience will likely result in a favourable response as postulated by the S-O-R model and demonstrated within the present study.

Additionally, practitioners may also offer rewards to tourists who share beneficial information that helps other tourists to visit the destination. This would encourage tourists to share their travelling experiences with beneficial information, such as price comparison, tips on transportation and opening hours of theme parks, hence promoting the destination voluntarily. More importantly, such activities would also strengthen tourists' emotional bonds and thereby reinforce their positive attitude towards the destination. Furthermore, it may also be helpful to explore tourists' love and positive surprise by creating content and campaigns within the SMDBC, which may be influential in strengthening tourists' intention to co-create and visit. Finally, paying attention to the value co-creation process on social media platforms within the business ecosystem today is critically important (Veloutsou and Black, 2019). Tourists may share positive or negative content on an SMDBC based on their opinions, experience or comments from others. Therefore, it is critical to work on the development of online dialogues, through formats such as chat rooms or instant messaging to provide quick responses and improve tourists' perceptions of the destination brand image (Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Ting *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). In addition to being present on social media, effective delivery of a message and instantaneous communication with tourists may prove to be the key to generating positive feelings towards a destination and may turn stimuli into favourable outcomes within destination tourism sectors.

Limitations and future research

Despite offering some meaningful theoretical insights and managerial practices in destination marketing and tourism, the study has a number of limitations. Firstly, only SMDBC's were examined as an independent variable in the present study, limiting the generalisability of the findings. Thus, future research may examine more constructs, such as tourists' enduring involvement and self-congruence to strengthen the explanatory power of the model. Secondly, as the study focussed on the importance of SMDBC, the potential effect of other marketing activities were not in the frame. As marketing strategies are integrated into nature, future research is recommended to investigate the integrated impact of SMDBC and rich media, such as virtual and augmented reality (Buhalis *et al.*, 2019), incorporating traditional marketing activities, such as print advertising, TV advertising and web advertising, in driving tourists' emotions and behavioural intention. Thirdly, Japan was adopted as the only destination context for this study, subsequently limiting the findings' generalisability in other popular destinations. As such, future research would be well placed to replicate the model in other destination contexts along with comparison amongst destinations, to strengthen the explanative and predictive capacities of the model, and thus the generalisability of the model. Fourthly, this study has adopted a survey approach to collect perceptual data to test the proposed model. Thus, future research may adopt secondary marketing data using content mining techniques to complement primary data so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SMDBC in different settings. Finally, the negative effects of SMDBC on tourists' emotion and behavioural responses were not considered within this study. Thus, future research could explore the negative emotions (Cooper *et al.*, 2019) along with

the negative effects of tourists' value heterogeneity on tourist' emotions and behavioural responses (Liao *et al.*, 2020). This will potentially extend the knowledge in the area of branding, specifically SMDBC and value co-creation in tourism marketing.

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Appendix

Table A1 Full collinearity assessment

Variable	Random dummy variable
Co-creation	2.836
Intention to visit	4.238
Joy	3.659
Love	3.960
Positive surprise	4.266
SMDBC	2.407

Table A2 Measurement model results

Construct	Loading	*t*-value	*Alpha*	CR
Social media based destination brand community			0.891	0.917
The community X allows direct user input or posting to the site	0.773	30.87		
Customers share experiences about tourism destination online with other customers	0.765	24.48		
The community X is useful for gathering various information about the tourism destination	0.842	46.64		
The members of this community benefit from the community X	0.832	45.77		
The members share a common bond with other members of the community X	0.828	39.47		
The members are strongly affiliated with other members	0.782	30.49		
Joy			0.939	0.954
I feel cheerful towards the destination (Japan)	0.883	45.61		
I feel a sense of delight towards the destination (Japan)	0.903	75.41		
I feel a sense of enthusiasm towards the destination (Japan)	0.909	75.03		
I feel a sense of joy towards the destination (Japan)	0.905	63.82		
I feel a sense of pleasure towards the destination (Japan)	0.885	57.51		
Love			0.929	0.955
I feel a sense of affection towards the destination (Japan)	0.922	75.18		
I feel a sense of caring towards the destination (Japan)	0.951	163.86		
I feel a sense of love towards the destination (Japan)	0.935	107.71		
Positive surprise			0.934	0.950
I feel a sense of amazement towards the destination (Japan)	0.901	81.98		
I feel a sense of astonishment towards the destination (Japan)	0.899	78.56		
I feel fascinated about the destination (Japan)	0.895	58.95		
I feel a sense of inspiration towards the destination (Japan)	0.872	47.95		
I feel a sense of surprise towards the destination (Japan)	0.882	63.71		
Co-creation			0.928	0.954
I often express my personal needs to community X	0.935	122.42		
I often find solutions to my problems together with community X	0.948	176.56		
Community X encourages users to create services or solutions together	0.922	115.18		
Intention to visit			0.852	0.910
If I get the chance to travel, I intend to visit the destination (Japan)	0.915	112.54		
When I go on a trip, the probability that I visit the destination (Japan) is high	0.923	112.01		
I will visit the destination (Japan) after visiting community X	0.793	24.59		

Table A3 Discriminant validity and correlations of constructs-based on Fornell-Larcker criterion

Constructs	Co-creation	Intention to visit	Joy	Love	Positive surprise	SMDBC	AVE
Co-creation	*0.935*						0.874
Intention to visit	0.775	*0.879*					0.772
Joy	0.538	0.723	*0.897*				0.805
Love	0.614	0.696	0.792	*0.936*			0.876
Positive surprise	0.610	0.740	0.801	0.829	*0.890*		0.792
SMDBC	0.679	0.731	0.605	0.611	0.627	*0.804*	0.647

Notes: Diagonal entries represent the AVE square roots of constructs. The off-diagonal entries represent the correlations between constructs

Table A4 Discriminant validity based on HTMT ratio

Constructs	Co-creation	Intention to visit	Joy	Love	Positive surprise	SMDBC
Co-creation						
Intention to visit	0.860					
Joy	0.577	0.824				
Love	0.660	0.791	0.848			
Positive surprise	0.654	0.840	0.856	0.891		
SMDBC	0.741	0.831	0.659	0.666	0.685	

Table A5 PLS-SEM analysis of research model

Relationship	Path coefficient	t-value	p-value	f^2	R^2	Q^2
Tourists' emotional responses						
SMDBC $\rightarrow$ joy	0.605	12.64	0.000	0.578	0.366	0.274
SMDBC $\rightarrow$ love	0.611	15.85	0.000	0.597	0.374	0.307
SMDBC $\rightarrow$ positive surprise	0.627	15.45	0.000	0.649	0.393	0.289
Co-creation						
Joy $\rightarrow$ co-creation	0.019	0.25	0.806	0.000	0.409	0.336
Love $\rightarrow$ co-creation	0.339	3.54	0.000	0.052		
Positive surprise $\rightarrow$ co-creation	0.314	3.16	0.002	0.043		
Intention to visit						
Co-creation $\rightarrow$ intention to visit	0.775	33.01	0.000	N/A*	0.601	0.436

Note: *N/A: effect size (f^2) is not required to be reported for the path with only one independent variable

Table A6 PLS-predict assessment

	PLS		LM		PLS-LM		Decision of predictive relevance
	RMSE	Q^2_predict	RMSE	Q^2_predict	RMSE	Q^2_predict	
Co-Create1	0.827	0.392	0.822	0.398	0.005	−0.006	Moderate
Co-Create2	0.751	0.463	0.756	0.456	−0.005	0.007	
Co-Create3	0.732	0.417	0.737	0.410	−0.005	0.007	
INT1	0.661	0.459	0.668	0.449	−0.007	0.010	Moderate
INT2	0.661	0.426	0.654	0.439	0.007	−0.013	
INT3	0.680	0.246	0.687	0.230	−0.007	0.016	
JOY1	0.880	0.288	0.881	0.285	−0.001	0.003	Strong
JOY2	0.898	0.289	0.900	0.287	−0.002	0.002	
JOY3	0.957	0.284	0.964	0.273	−0.007	0.011	
JOY4	0.974	0.287	0.987	0.267	−0.013	0.020	
JOY5	0.967	0.286	0.977	0.270	−0.010	0.016	
LOVE1	1.120	0.283	1.130	0.282	−0.010	0.001	Moderate
LOVE2	1.081	0.366	1.083	0.364	−0.002	0.002	
LOVE3	1.216	0.312	1.208	0.321	0.008	−0.009	
PS1	1.041	0.319	1.050	0.307	−0.009	0.012	Strong
PS2	1.063	0.343	1.069	0.335	−0.006	0.008	
PS3	1.129	0.268	1.136	0.258	−0.007	0.010	
PS4	0.998	0.311	1.004	0.303	−0.006	0.008	
PS5	1.056	0.283	1.069	0.265	−0.013	0.018	

Notes: PLS = PLS-SEM, LM = linear regression, Co-create = co-creation, INT = intention to visit, JOY = joy, LOVE = love, PS = positive surprise

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